

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC  
The Players Club

AND/OR COMMON  
The Players Club

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
16 Gramercy Park

\_\_NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

New York

\_\_ VICINITY OF

17

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

New York

36

New York

61

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME  
The Players, Alfred Drake, President

STREET & NUMBER

16 Gramercy Park

CITY, TOWN

STATE

New York

\_\_ VICINITY OF

New York

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
New York County Hall of Records

STREET & NUMBER

31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN

STATE

New York

New York

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
None

DATE

\_\_FEDERAL \_\_STATE \_\_COUNTY \_\_LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED, minor	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Players Club house was built circa 1845 as a private residence at 16 Gramercy Park. Booth purchased the house in 1888 from its second owner for \$75,000 and commissioned Stanford White of the New York architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White to redesign the townhouse as a clubhouse. White, a member of the Players, remodeled the Gothic exterior in the style of the Italian Renaissance, by adding a two story loggia, complete with two large wrought iron lamps and grillwork railing on both balconies. The house is entered through a splitlevel vestibule from which one can descend to the basement, which houses the bar, billiard room and kitchen, and below that, ~~the~~ subbasement with its dirt floor, which houses the heating plant. Returning to the vestibule, one may either proceed up the stairs to the second floor, or mount a short flight of steps into the Great Hall of the first floor. This room is notable for the large pillars which frame the room, and the great marble fireplace in the west wall. To the north of this room is a front parlor, and to the south is the dining room, which is notable for its wood panelling, tile fireplaces and parquet floor. The dining room was expanded to the south, into the former garden in 1960, and so now extends almost all the way to 19th Street. The original wallpaper in this room has been duplicated and replaced. Proceeding to the second floor, one notices the many paintings, posters, playbills, and other memorabilia connected with people of the theater which hang on the stairwell. At the stair landing, just below the second floor is the door to the "Sarah Bernhardt elevator," a single occupancy elevator, so-called after an instance when the famous actress was stranded between floors in the same elevator. The second floor contains the library, which is the second largest library of 19th century American theater. In the 1960 addition over the dining room is housed the Mulholland Magic Collection, perhaps the third ~~or~~ fourth best magic library in the world. There is also a cardroom on the second floor.

On the third floor, the most notable feature is Edwin Booth's apartment, which has been preserved as he left it upon his death, with its original furnishings and wallpaper. The fireplace in this room was moved there from his house in Boston. The apartment extends the width of the house on the north end. An arched partition separates the bedroom from the parlor. The only vestige of his brother, John Wilkes Booth, which Edwin allowed in his presence, is a photograph hung on the bedroom wall. The other end of the third floor is occupied by offices. On the fourth floor are seven plain and simple apartments which are used by members staying overnight in town. There is also a simple penthouse on the roof which is used as a bedroom.

The interior furnishings of the Players Club reflect Stanford White's touch. The marble fireplaces, the brass starbursts which ornament the ceiling light fixtures, the Great Hall fireplace from the Middle East, and the red carpets in the halls were all elements of White's conception for the theatrical club. These ornaments, together with the wealth of theatrical costumes, props and other memorabilia combine to create a rich and mellow atmosphere.

A statue of Booth in the role of Hamlet is located across from the club, in Gramercy Park.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1888, remodeled

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Stanford White

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

In 1888, Edwin Booth, the founder and first president of the Players, donated his house at 16 Gramercy Park, New York City, as the clubhouse of that famous theatrical organization, in the year of its origin.

The Players Club, established as a meeting place where members of the theatrical profession might mingle with writers, artists and other interested men of affairs, has not changed substantially since it was redesigned as a club by Stanford White.

The four story townhouse presently houses an extensive library of theater, collected memorabilia of Booth and other leading figures of the stage, as well as are recreational, dining and some sleeping facilities for club members.

## HISTORY

When Edwin Booth purchased 16 Gramercy Park in 1887, he was nearing the end of a forty year career on the stage which had elevated him to the highest rank of the theatrical profession. Despite his personal success, most notably as a tragedian in such plays as Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Richard III and Othello, Booth recognized the generally low state of the actor in Victorian society, and so conceived the idea of the Players, modelled after Garricks in London, where members of the theatrical profession could meet as equals other members of the expressive arts. The club was to be:

a beacon to incite emulation in the "poor player" -- to lift himself up to a higher social grade than the Bohemian level that so many worthy members of my profession grovel in from sheer lack of incentive to go up higher. In time it will have a better effect on the morale of the actor than can possibly be produced by all the benevolent "funds" and "homes" that have been or may be provided for him.<sup>1</sup>

One crucial feature of the proposed club was to be the library of the theater, which could provide the educational and historical perspective for such a program of social and intellectual betterment. To this end, Booth contributed his own large library and continued to purchase books, paintings and other artifacts of the theater. The result of Booth's concern is that the Players Club now houses one of the finest and rarest collections of theatrical literature and memorabilia. In the great hall is a lighted display case exhibiting dozens of the accoutrements carried or worn by Edwin Booth on stage and literally hundreds of items similarly



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related to other members of the Booth family and other famous men and women of the American theater. Booth's costumes, the death masks of Booth and John Kean, and countless paintings and portraits of actors and actresses, including works by Gilbert Stuart, John Naegle and John Singer Sargent's portrait of Booth himself, are also displayed. The library, which includes one thousand books and mementos of Booth's, contains Shakespeare's second, third, and fourth folios in excellent condition, the William Henderson Collection of 40 volumes of English playbills, from 1750 to 1888, and the Dunlap Society Publications (fostered by the Players for publishing manuscripts, books, and pamphlets relating to the history of the American theater). In addition, holdings include approximately 1,300 letters, 340 of Booth's among them, 15,000 theater programs and playbills from 1730 to date, and 18,000 photographs related to English and American stage. The club's collections have so expanded that the house can no longer accommodate them all.

On January 7, 1888, the Players Club was incorporated by Booth, Lawrence Barrett, William Bispham, Samuel Clemens (whose pool cue still adorns the billiards room), Augustin and Joseph Daly, John Drew, Joseph Jefferson, John A. Lane, James Lewis, Brander Matthews, Stephen H. Olin, A. M. Palmer and General William Tecumseh Sherman. The officers, who were elected later, were; Booth, President; Augustin Daly, Vice President; Laurence Hutton, Secretary; Bispham, Treasurer; and the directors were Palmer, Henry Edwards, Jefferson, and Joseph Daly. Booth commissioned Bispham to locate a suitable home for the club and so 16 Gramercy Park was purchased and Stanford White was brought in to undertake the remodeling of the private home.

The clubhouse was formally opened on New Year's Eve of the same year. Booth lived in the club from its opening until his death, whenever he was in New York. It was in fact in his bed on the third floor that he died on June 7, 1893, and his apartment has not been altered since that day. Neither in deed has the Players itself. It is still a meeting-place for the players and their friends and has in addition become a repository for a wealth of material on the American stage. Its appearance and atmosphere continue to reflect the spirit of its founders, and in the collected pictures, costumes and other memorabilia, one may still feel their presence.

<sup>1</sup> Edwin Booth, quoted in: Richard Lockridge, Darling of Misfortune Edwin Booth: 1833-1893 (Century Co., New York, 1932), p. 313.